

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA  
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

---

Volume 49 | Number 8 (Spring 1989)

pps. 732-733

---

## Handbook for Research in American History: a Guide to Bibliographies and Other Reference Works

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1989 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use,  
not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

"Handbook for Research in American History: a Guide to Bibliographies and Other  
Reference Works." *The Annals of Iowa* 49 (1989), 732-733.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9367>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

## Book Notices

*Handbook for Research in American History: A Guide to Bibliographies and Other Reference Works*, by Francis Paul Prucha. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987. xiii, 289 pp. Index. \$21.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

Francis Paul Prucha's handbook to reference materials in American history provides beginning students with direction for their research and established historians an opportunity to familiarize themselves with recent reference materials. While the compiler denies that his work is a definitive listing, few users will have reason to bemoan the exclusion of their personal preferences. Those researchers seeking specialized reference tools will find them included in the general guides contained in the first part of this handbook. Prucha has concentrated on the last few decades because of the profusion of reference materials. Older materials are present, especially when they have been updated.

Part one of the guide contains categories of materials by format: bibliographies, book review indexes, manuscript guides, and so forth. Part two contains fifteen subject categories such as political, military, and social history; ethnic groups; education and religion; and travel accounts. Each section has a brief introduction, followed by the materials displayed in bibliographic essays and lists. The narrative is descriptive rather than critical. The introductions are written succinctly, but loaded with information. "Databases" (136), for instance, provides the pros and cons of computerized database searching from the historians' perspective in only a few well-chosen sentences. Other categories, however, deserve more detail. "Libraries: Catalogs and Guides" (7) is one example. One technological change mentioned—the replacement of card catalogs with a variety of computerized systems—is a recent development that promises to bewilder uninitiated historians whose research takes them to many libraries and archives.

Items frequently belong in several categories. The compiler has reconciled that problem by providing cross references throughout the text, as well as in the index. The subject groupings in the meticulously prepared index are particularly useful.

Prucha has compiled a historical guide that achieves the delicate balance between helpful commentary and the presentation of an abundance of material. Because this handbook is written by a historian

### Book Notices

who knows bibliography and the research needs of students, teachers of historical reference courses should consider the inexpensive paper-bound edition for required reading.

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

GAROLD L. COLE

*Civil War Eyewitnesses: An Annotated Bibliography of Books and Articles, 1955-1986*, by Garold L. Cole. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988. viii, 351 pp. Index. \$29.95 cloth.

This is a reference work of great promise. Garold Cole has scoured library collections and journals to produce a bibliography of almost 1,400 published firsthand accounts of the Civil War. Included are accounts by Union and Confederate soldiers, civilians of both sides, and foreign observers. Particularly valuable are the annotations for each source which describe the writer, the type of account (letter, diary, memoir), and the content. This bibliography surveys publications from 1955, when interest in the Civil War centennial accelerated, to 1986, a period which has not been covered adequately by other bibliographies, annotated or otherwise.

This work will facilitate serious research as well as reveal to even casual readers the great complexity of the Civil War in America. The annotations provide a glimpse of the diversity of the Civil War experience and remind us that the war involved more than famous generals. The firsthand accounts document the rigors of army life, the true horror of battle, the plight of the pathetic wounded in inadequate hospitals, the struggles of families left behind, and the often inhumane conditions endured by prisoners of war.

Iowa's contribution to the war is represented by more than forty accounts from thirty different regiments which encompass almost every major and minor campaign from the Dakotas to Sherman's March to the Sea. The bibliography contains entries for letters and memoirs of soldiers' wives who reported on conditions in Iowa.

One problem with this work is that the annotations are uneven in length and sometimes in quality. Books usually receive longer descriptions, but there are perplexing exceptions. Article annotations suffer the same difficulty. More serious, this bibliography is plagued by literally dozens of embarrassing misspellings and typographical errors, including errors in the index. Three accounts were garbled when portions of the titles or annotations were lopped off. The author and the publisher deserve considerable blame for marring what otherwise is a valuable reference work.

CORNELL COLLEGE

M. PHILIP LUCAS

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.